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ABSTRACT

This curriculum unit takes the form of historical fiction, an original story for middle school students which revolves around the 16th-century Spanish conquest of Guatemala and the Mayan people. Incorporated into the story are many of the Mayan sites, ruins, geography, culture, legends, historical characters, and cities. The climax is set at the world heritage archaeological national park, Tikal. Includes only 5 of the unit's 11 total chapters. (BT)

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Fulbright Seminar Fellowship Project
Mexico & Guatemala, 2000

by Kenny Karem

Search for Tikal: Lost City of the Maya manuscript, story

For my Fulbright Seminar education project, I completed an historical fiction, a story for middle school students, ages 9-14. It revolves around the 16th Century Spanish conquest of Guatemala and the Mayan people. I incorporated many of the Mayan sites, ruins, geography, culture, legends, historical characters and cities into the story with the climax set at the world heritage archaeological national park, Tikal.

This story is intended to inspire young readers to appreciate the marvels of the Mayan culture and instill a desire to learn more and visit the many living Mayan cultures of today in Central America. Many of the customs, crafts, agricultural practices, clothing and religion are still practiced there today. I chose this project because there is very little historical fiction or story available which a teacher or student can utilize. I have found that as a middle school teacher, my students are fascinated by any Native American culture. It is a shame that in our North American school systems, the magnificent Mayans, as well as the Incas and Aztecs and other cultures, are so underutilized. All of their stories, past and present, have many lessons to teach us all.

I am including here only 5 chapters out of the total of eleven chapters. I have completed the entire project, including a glossary and chapter summary which are not included here. Since this manuscript has just been sent to an editor, (August, 2000), I have no idea at this moment when it will be published or who will publish it.

If an educator or student would like to have a copy of the complete of the manuscript, please contact me and I will try to make you a copy. I will only charge you a photocopying and mailing costs.

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SEARCH FOR TIKAL:

LOST CITY OF THE MAYA

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SEARCH FOR TIKAL:

LOST CITY OF THE MAYA

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Preface

All aspects of the Mayan culture described in this story -- cities, ruins, geographical sites, flora and fauna, gods, foods, clothing items, jewelry, architectural features, household items and books -- can be found in Guatemala and other Central American countries today. Most of the characters are fictional, but some are authentic historical figures. It is confusing to read names of characters both in common English and in Mayan dialects, but this is the way they have been translated from Mayan glyphs in books, murals, stelas and ceramics. All fictional and non-fictional characters as well as many other Mayan cultural terms are defined in the glossary.

The story takes place in 1524 A.D. during the initial Spanish invasion of the Mayan kingdoms in Mexico, Guatemala and other Central America countries by the expeditions of Pedro de Alvarado and Hernán Cortés.

In some cases, certain historical incidents, facts, natural history or customs have been slightly altered or moved in location to improve the dramatic qualities of the story. These are described in the epilogue, glossary and map at the end of the story.

Chapter 1

Ritual at the Ruins of Utatlán

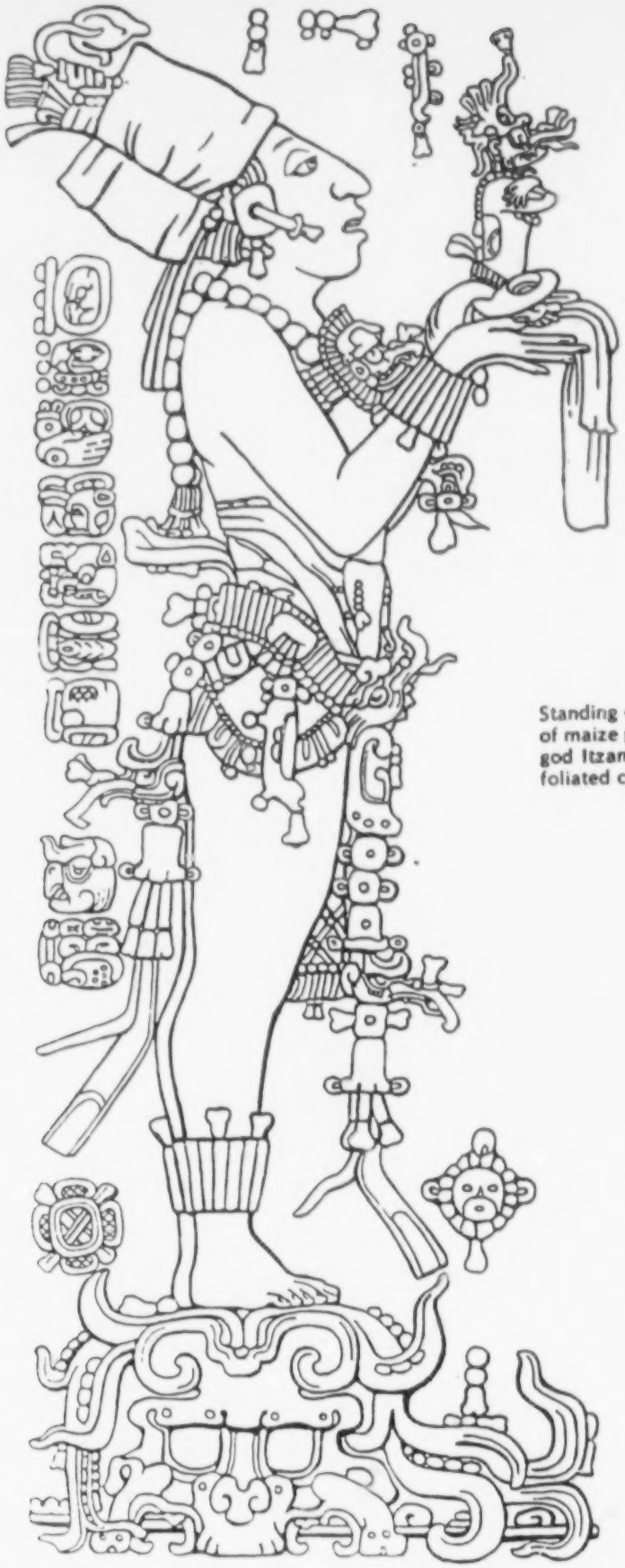
Illuminated by the flickering fire, a dispassionate face carved in a stone slab stared outward as if expecting an offering. Wispy sweet-smelling smoke curled snaked slowly upward around the stela like a silver serpent. Then it disappeared into the darkness of the night. With carefully selected movements and words, an old man softly uttered his plea as he bent over and added another handful of *copal* incense to the smoldering ashes in the gold platter. Then he solemnly began his prayer.

Itzamna, God of the heavens,
who gives us our life and our food,
we honor and praise you
here at Utatlán, our sacred place,
with these gifts of quetzal feathers and jade.

The temples of Utatlán had been holy places where gods and humans met at the portals -- gateways to the different sides of the world -- and where destinies were determined. Now it must happen again.

Coatl admired the smooth deep green of the skillfully-crafted jade necklace and the intricacy of the exquisite plumes of the rare quetzal bird. Surely these worthy gifts would please the gods. He added more wood to the fire inside the large stone urn which was balanced upon the back of an immense carved tortoise. In its deliberate measured gait, the tortoise symbolically carried the Mayan world on its back, maintaining order and the balance of life. In this critical moment, Coatl believed that he must appease the gods to assure a continuing balance in the Mayan world.

Coatl was known throughout the Mayan realm, particularly in his Quiché Mayan band, as one of the most powerful priests, a shaman whose skills were widely respected and feared. His knowledge of appropriate religious practices, his dignified conduct of rituals and his rumored



Standing on an ornamental skull from which symbols of maize protrude, a priest holds a jade figurine of the god Itzam Na. This is a detail from the panel of the foliated cross at Palenque. (After A. P. Maudslay)

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mystical powers combined to earn him a commanding reputation. But as he stood before the main temple doorway at Utatlán amidst the ruins of this once-revered but now abandoned religious ceremonial site, he wondered if he could summon the magical power that many people believed he possessed -- the ability to communicate with the gods.

Looking about the empty ceremonial square, Coatl sensed the presence of the gods and his ancestral spirits. Would they respond to this traditional summons? He raise the large conch shell to his mouth and blew forcefully. A loud wail passed through the forest canopy. He bowed wearily towards a *stela*, one of the old tree stones, carved by some unknown skilled sculptor a thousand years ago. This mammoth slab featured Itzamna, an ancestral warrior king in full-length feathered headdress. He was surrounded by glyphs, the mysterious symbol-writing which described this particular lord's history. There were many old trees stones at Utatlán and Coatl was one of the few who could read their glyphs.

Coatl waved a quetzal feather at the stone figure and raised his voice slightly. I must summon more energy for this chant, he thought.

Itzamná, Lord of the nights and days,
give us protection from the bearded white invaders
who come to destroy our way of life,
and the balance in our universe,
and to dishonor your temples.

As he gazed at the stern visage of Itzamná, he thought that surely the bearded white invaders must be the enemies of the gods too. Had they not already desecrated the great Aztec temples to the north? His calling of the gods was proper. Then the doubts flooded into his mind. Why hadn't the gods helped the Aztecs against the foreign invaders?

He forced these sacrilegious doubts from his mind and examined the constellations in the sky. His priestly colleagues, the stargazers, had selected a most favorable night for his pleas. He felt tired, though, and knew that he must extract more energy from his aged body to properly complete the ritual.

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Hoping to induce a vision, Coatl stuffed shredded tobacco into his clay pipe and lit it. As he inhaled the sweet smoke, he relaxed. Puffs of smoke drifted upward as he recalled how his ancestors relied on tobacco to release the mind from the restricting trap of the body.

Hidden behind a nearby tree stone, two youths crouched, observing the labored movements of the old shaman. Zotil and Chela, brother and sister, had crept out of their home in the city of Chichicastenango while their parents slept and had ventured into the mountains to Utatlan. There had always been stories that the abandoned ruins of Utatlán had once been a power place where priests had consulted the gods. Zotil and Chela had accepted a large wager from some friends to dare witness a secret mysterious night ritual. Like everyone else, they were familiar with the impressive reputation of Coatl as a powerful medicine man who reputedly conducted strange rituals alone at Utatlán. They had been tipped by their friends that he would be here tonight. Besides winning an easy wager, it seemed like an exciting worthwhile risk. But this feeble old man looked helpless and weary, the opposite of someone who supposedly *talked* with the gods.

Zotil was a tall, slender young man with bronze skin and dark brown eyes, appearing much older than his nineteen years. His agile body, quick movements and alert gaze suggested an ocelot, a nocturnal cat which prowled the forest. His sister, Chela, who was two years younger, was much shorter but of sturdy build. She wore her long straight black hair in the customary single braid. Her lively brown eyes and calm, pleasant demeanor complimented her mischievous personality.

Thus far, they had been disappointed with a rather routine, even dull, religious ritual. What was so impressive about this small, frail old priest? Perhaps his reputation was based on some fabled accomplishments of his youth. Dressed in a simple white robe decorated only by a plain, feathered green serpent and wearing a jade pendant, he seemed like any ordinary old man wandering around the streets of Chichicastenango. Even the few temples they could notice by moonlight and the glow of the fire were nothing more than moss-covered, vine entangled rubble. It did not appear to be a place of power or even mystery.

Observing the weary movements of the old man, Zotil quipped sarcastically, "I think he has inhaled too much copal incense. Look how he staggers."

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"Quiet!" snapped Chela. "He'll hear us." She didn't want to risk discovery and the eventual wrath of her parents.

"Ha! He looks half-dead!" laughed Zotil. "Let's leave. This is boring. We have seen a secret ritual, even if it was a rather ordinary one, and we can claim the wager."

"Not yet," advised Chela as she patiently watched the old man. "Isn't that a strange jade pendant he's wearing? I can't quite make out its shape."

"It looks like an ordinary trinket," replied Zotil.

Abruptly Coatl pulled out a large thorn and jabbed it into his right ear lobe with only a fleeting grimace of pain. He squeezed drops of blood on a piece of prayer parchment covered with glyph writing, then placed the red-stained paper in the sacrificial gold platter. He lit the parchment, added more incense and a puff of smoke trailed upward. His movements were suddenly more energetic and graceful and his words more authoritative.

Send Ah Puch,
god of war,
as the instrument of your wrath
against our enemies--the invaders from the outside
and those among our own people.
Let Him fill our warriors
with courage and strength,
our leaders with wisdom,
and our priest with knowledge
to repel this spreading evil.

Even though they had witnessed many blood-letting rituals before in the city temples, they were surprised by the sudden emotional intensity of Coatl's actions and words.

"Now that's a little more exciting," whispered Zotil to Chela. "What else do you have up your sleeve, old one?"

Ignoring her brother's sarcastic comments, Chela wished she could see the words on the burning parchment. Having learned her glyph-reading ability from her father, a scribe, she figured

that she could decipher most of it. She wondered to whom Coatl was referring when he chanted, "...Our enemies...the invaders...and those from within?"

With deft hands, Coatl quickly pulled out a hawk from a bag, and avoiding its red talons and beak, slit its throat with his black obsidian knife. He quickly cut out its heart and placed it while still beating on the gold platter. The warm blood caused the incense to sizzle and sputter smoke.

When Zotil and Chela saw the sacrifice of the hawk, they realized that they were witnessing a very significant ritual. Rarely was a bird of such admired beauty and strength sacrificed. They were also surprised by the sudden transformation of Coatl into a vigorous petitioner. His stature now seemed to match the towering ancient sacred *ceiba* tree overhanging the bloody sacrifice. The enormous limbs, roots and trunk of the holy old tree touched the sky and connected it to the earth and the underworld. Looming impressively over the temple portal like a sentinel, the *ceiba* tree united the three worlds of the Mayan universe.

Coatl glanced at the sacred space below the portal and the guardian tree, hoping for some initial sign from the gods. The once frail old man waved his arms dynamically as he chanted and bowed vigorously in all directions. Despite the chill of the mountain air, they could see beads of perspiration on his determined face. His eyes flashed with fire. He seemed like one of the mute regal figures carved in the stone stela.

Zotil wondered about what sort of trickery was involved in this metamorphosis. Could someone have switched places with Coatl in the dim light? Chela found herself becoming increasingly apprehensive and doubtful of their judgment in accepting some foolish wager to spy on an old priest.

Like a thunderbolt, Coatl darted through the drifting smoke and flames, lifted the gold platter towards the temple and shouted in a terrifying voice.

Come, Feathered Serpent, Kukulcan,
God who has protected the Mayan people.
Now is the time to strike your enemies
like a thunderbolt
and cast them from your sacred places.

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Coatl pierced his other ear lobe with a thorn and smeared the blood over his cheeks. He felt himself renewed, with strength spreading throughout his body. The touch and smell of his own blood excited him and he could actually sense his own blood surging to his heart, his hands...and now his head. What greater gift is there, he thought, as he pricked himself in the wrist this time to draw more blood, than that of one's own blood to offer the gods--except one's life. Should I give my life now, he wondered? Would that be the best use of his life in order to attract the gods' intercession?

Intoxicated with the idea, he punctured his wrists again and dripped more blood into the platter. He wanted to send his impassioned words upward with the smoke and reached inside himself for a desperate but determined plea.

Look now, Kukulcan!
See my blood flows red in your honor!
Remember Lord Yaxmochxoc, our loyal ancestor
whose gaze from this tree stone slab
recalls many past victories.
We, the blood descendants of that great lord
implore your aid once again.
I will give you my life now, if you wish,
for your help and guidance for our people.
My blood belongs to you.

The wind arose instantly, building into a howling gale. As tree limbs and leaves swept by, the savage fury of the wind sounded like a gusty reply of jumbled voices. With a growing fear, Chela cowered, wondering if the raging wind was answering the shaman. Would the gods be offended by their surreptitious presence? Bewildered momentarily, Zotil wondered what type of man he had been mocking.

Coatl moved like a twirling cyclone, spinning amidst frantic flames and swirling smoke. The once quiet ruins shook as a roar seemed to exit the temple and pass through the portals. Coatl took several bold steps toward the portal then knelt down. He strained his eyes and listened carefully, but

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he avoided crossing the entranceway to the portal. As if responding to the sounds rushing from the temple, Coatl finished his plea with resoluteness and confidence.

Itzamná, Lord of all Gods,
your humble servant has received your message.
The path is determined
and it must be traveled
whatever the consequences
...to the ***end!***

As suddenly as the uproar had begun, it ceased. There was a cooling silence. Nothing stirred. Then, once again, the sounds of insects and birds broke the stillness.

Exhausted and depleted, Coatl slumped to the ground, satisfied that the gods had answered him. Many of his doubts had been expelled and now he knew what action to take. A plan was clear in his mind. The faces of his ancestors carved in the surrounding tree stones glared at him intently, like intermediaries with the gods. But why wasn't he completely assured? Once again he looked below the temple portal at the sacred area. Didn't he see the gods come from the *other side* and hover there for a few moments? He forced the doubts from his mind as he unconsciously wiped away some of the dried blood. He stood up and looked around.

"Come out now!" ordered Coatl, his voice a command which shattered the natural sounds of the forest.

As he stared in their direction, the astonished spies slowly peered out from the stela then reluctantly stepped out.

"The ritual has ended. Don't be afraid. We must talk now," he added.

Once again, it was the ordinary old man, weary as before but more confident and intense. A wrinkled face framed by long, straight white hair stared at them. At close range, his penetrating eyes seemed to bore into them with a searching, probing intelligence. He motioned for them to sit down.

Chela finally stammered, "We came to watch you. We were told..."

"I know why you are here," interrupted Coatl.

"We didn't intend to offend you in any way, but we..." continued Chela apologetically.

"You didn't," replied Coatl simply. "I hope you haven't been disappointed."

Having recovered his customary boldness, Zotil added, "I enjoyed watching your...*ritual*. You have the hands and the feet of a magician."

"Thank you," said Coatl guardedly.

"Were you using some mind-altering drugs? You seemed rather frantic and, at the end, perhaps hallucinatory," noted Zotil.

"Ha! Rather cocky, aren't you, young man?" hooted Coatl. "There are things that you wouldn't understand. And this might surprise you--I knew that you would be here tonight. I saw you both hidden behind the stela."

"Is that so?" questioned Zotil.

"Oh yes," said Coatl with a slight laugh. "It has all been prophesied in the ancient book of Solola. I cannot explain it to you now, but I can tell you that your presence here tonight was...*arranged*."

"By whom?" asked Zotil.

"By several anonymous people," he answered assuredly. "The wager with your friends was a ply to get you to come here. Oh, you can collect it from your friends, if you wish. We have already paid them a special fee for their services."

"Ridiculous!" laughed Zotil.

"Yes, isn't it?" replied Coatl. "You are the son and daughter of Patut, the *chilan*, a talented scribe, and Ticulta, a skillful weaver. And they know that you are here."

"But how did they know?" asked Chela.

With a wave of the hand, Coatl snapped, "Because I ordered them to send you to me. Enough of this. We have little time for such bantering. Now listen to me."

As he wiped some dried blood off his face and hands, he pointed to the stone slab.

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"That is Yaxmochxoc, the great lord king who established the royal dynasty at Tikal over a thousand years ago."

Zotil had studied Tikal in school. All students were familiar with the story of the legendary jungle city, a pilgrimage mecca of long ago. He had heard about the wonders of towering temples that reached above the trees and touched the sky. But he also heard that it had been destroyed many centuries ago. There were still many rumors of hidden treasure stashed there for the great lords, preserved for their journey to the other world.

Coatl continued, "I must tell you some things that will be difficult for you to believe. The blood of the noble Lord Yaxmochxoc flows in my veins--and in *your veins too*. Yes, we are both ancestors of the great lord and kin to each other in a distant way."

He paused, noting the skepticism on Zotil's face and the confusion on Chela's face, then he continued.

"I regret telling you now that your parents are not your true parents," Coatl added softly. "They are your guardians, appointed by me using my authority as a high priest in the temple and as principle advisor to Lord Mountain Eagle. I placed you with them when you were very young. Your real parents were killed."

"I believe none of this," snapped Zotil angrily.

"Our real parents were killed? How?" asked Chela in disbelief.

"By those who oppose the rule of any lord or anyone of royal blood related to past lords...such as *you and me*. Many of the past lords were vain and cruel tyrants, interested in glorifying themselves through the construction of magnificent temples, monuments, stelas and even cities."

"Built by the toil of sweating peasants, no doubt," added Zotil sarcastically.

"Unfortunately, that is true," replied Coatl. "But these temples were also erected to honor the gods who protect, sustain and guide us."

"Oh really?" commented Zotil skeptically. "So why should we care about such monuments and cities of past tyrants? If your tale of our royal ancestry is true, do you really expect us to cherish the historic sins of the past, built upon the toil of the common people?"

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"You are obviously very intelligent, Zotil, but a bit too inexperienced, uninformed and naive," said Coatl sternly.

"I wasn't that impressed with your show of flashy tricks. Your religious...*rituals*... may excite the masses and it's an effective controlling device, but times have changed and I think that the people need to..."

"Silence, impudent one!" ordered Coatl. "Understand this!"

He abruptly grabbed Zotil's hand and jabbed a thorn into his wrist then did the same to his own. Zotil resisted but couldn't deter the amazing strength of the old man. Coatl held his bleeding wrist against the wrist of Zotil for several moments, then released it. He quickly repeated the same ritual with Chela. Sensing the importance of cooperation, she willingly allowed Coatl to complete the ritual, curious to understand its meaning.

"*This* is what is *true*. Your blood is my blood. It travels through our veins and gives us life," stated Coatl, "and we offer it to our gods and ancestral spirits whether you like it or not."

With one hand, he smeared their blood on their cheeks and foreheads then held their wrists up toward the stela and the temple.

"Yes, as you said, the times have changed," he continued with a touch of anger. "And all our lives will change soon in ways we cannot determine. But there are things we must do and both of you must be a part of it. You have no choice."

Coatl dropped their hands and stood up, glaring at them. He paused deliberately, waiting to calm himself.

"There are always choices," replied Zotil defiantly.

"What is it that you think we should do, Coatl ?" asked Chela. She knew there were many things that Coatl had not revealed and she wanted to coax him into divulging some of his secrets.

"You have heard that the white invaders have already conquered the mighty Aztec empire to the north and their invincible capital, Tenochtitlan. They have come across the great water and call themselves *Spaniards*," explained Coatl calmly. "They are unlike any men you have ever seen and their power is formidable. They will come here soon."

"Here?" asked Chela with surprise.

"I fear their intent is to conquer all Mayan tribes," continued Coatl. "I have learned that these strangers perform astonishing feats with powers and weapons none of us have never seen or imagined. Perhaps their gods are more powerful than our gods."

The sharp painful doubt of his own statement thrust into his brain like a lance. Where did it come from? If their gods were indeed more powerful, then all action would be useless. Coatl forced the thought from his mind.

Chela perceived the implication of his unexpected words. She suddenly felt sorry for the aged priest, sensing his deep doubts and inner turmoil.

"And so?" Chela asked kindly.

"We must prepare to fight the invaders here in the highlands. That I know we must do; but, if we are defeated here..." Coatl stated, then stopped.

"Then what?" asked Zotil.

"Then we must flee these mountains and seek safety in the remote lowlands...at Tikal," stated Coatl simply.

"Did you say *we*?" asked Chela. "Why do you need us?"

"Tikal? I thought that was a ruined relic of the past, swallowed up somewhere by the steamy jungle," said Zotil. "Who would want to hide in the wretched hot jungle? There are better places to hide. This doesn't make a lot of sense to me."

"Because you are descended from the great lords, the lineage must continue to preserve our tradition," replied Coatl. "And at Tikal, we will have friends who will help and protect us. It is your destiny."

"Our destiny? Determined by who? Even if we are kin to the so-called great lord kings of the past, what makes you think we want the noble lineage to continue?" questioned Zotil sharply. "Perhaps you are just a slightly deranged temple priest who fears losing his influence and powers. Maybe your best days are over--just like these ruins here."

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The sharp words penetrated to Coatl's deepest self-doubts; but he was determined not to show it. He recognized not only Zotil's youthful arrogance and inexperience, but also a toughness, inner strength and probing intelligence.

"Excuse his brashness," said an embarassed Chela. "My brother has not yet learned many diplomatic skills. But he does speak of important things we need to know."

She is the real diplomat, thought Coatl, the one who will be useful for dealing with the difficult situations ahead.

"Of course. Anyone would be skeptical of the unusual things you have learned tonight," Coatl answered. "It is important to our people that as many royal blood lines as possible be maintained. It is tradition that binds us together. But even if you dismiss these beliefs and customs in favor of your own feelings, remember this: the Spaniards will kill you once they find out about your Quiché Mayan royal ancestry!"

Coatl jabbed his finger into Zotil's chest to emphasize the point. He knew he would need every skill and trick to persuade them of the gravity of the situation in order to gain their cooperation. He reached inside his robe and pulled out a leather-bound packet. As he carefully unwrapped it, they noticed several pieces of folded parchment. They recognized some symbols in the glyph writing. Some symbols represented some familiar names, gods, animals and objects, but there were also symbols that referred to specific places, temples and terms they couldn't interpret.

"Here is another reason why you must accompany me to Tikal," explained Coatl, deliberately shielding most of the pages. "These are some pages from the ancient Mayan book, the Solola. It contains information about secret hiding places at Tikal where the ancient ones hid many valuable items long ago."

"Treasure?" asked Zotil curiously.

"The wealth of many lords, so spectacular that you cannot imagine it--jewelry, objects, masks crafted exquisitely from silver, turquoise, jade and gold," answered Coatl. He could see intense interest rising in both of them. He forgave himself for using these misleading tales of treasure as a necessary trick to win their cooperation for his plan.

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"How do you know that it's so *spectacular*?" asked Zotil skeptically.

"I have sources of reliable information," replied Coatl confidently.

"Treasures extracted through the labors of the people, no doubt," commented Zotil. "And for whom was this spectacular wealth intended?"

"It is the heritage of our ancestors for our people of the future," answered Coatl.

"Oh?" replied Zotil.

"But just as important, there are books, pottery and murals which record the history and beliefs of our people. These things must be protected. These pages here reveal various locations. The Spaniards have been looting treasure and destroying books and pottery wherever they go. They suspect that there is hidden treasure in every city, temple or even small village. Ever since these documents were entrusted to me when I was a young priest, I have kept them hidden and safe. Now we must take them to Amachel, the high priest at Tikal, for their protection from the Spaniards and even some Mayan enemies. Even Amachel doesn't know about the existence of these documents or any treasure site in Tikal."

"And what if we refuse to go?" asked Zotil daringly.

"Among those hidden items at Tikal are things more valuable than treasure," replied Coatl emphatically. "I cannot explain now. I'll just say that they are the keys that open portals for the Mayan mind and spirit and help us cross to the *other world*. Would you deny your own being? Would you refuse to help your own people?"

His words penetrated their hearts. At first, they thought about the absurdity of this situation--sitting at night amidst some strange dilapidated ruins and listening to bizarre tales of ancestry, treasure and foreign invaders. Originally they had sought a show of novelty--and perhaps this was it. But they had to admit that there seemed to be some truth in the old priest's words. Did he really communicate with the gods? Did he really receive some secret special mission? If that were true, then how could they oppose his will? Dare they deny the gods?

Whether Coatl was a senile fool or not, their curiosity was captured. Why not cooperate in part until more of this mystery was revealed? Even if there was no treasure and no Tikal, this could prove to be very interesting...or amusing.

"We will cooperate for now," answered Chela for both of them. "But there is more we need to know about your plan."

"Good. I am happy to have your cooperation. But I cannot tell you anything else right now for your own safety -- and for the protection of others," answered Coatl.

From inside his robe, Coatl pulled out two small green jade pendants and placed them around their necks. Carved in the shape of a feathered serpent, the smooth, cool surfaces of the pendants flickered in the faint glow of the fire.

"You recognize these as images of our god, Kukulcan, of course," said Coatl. "He will help protect you. From many centuries ago, the feathered serpent has been the insignia of the royal clan, used only by those whose blood can be traced to the ancient lords."

"I noticed that you were wearing a pendant similar to these," said Chela as she rubbed her pendant.

"Very observant, Chela. They are identical," said Coatl as he pulled out his feathered serpent pendant from around his neck.

"Your name, Coatl, means 'serpent', right?" asked Zotil

"Yes. I was named to honor the god, Kukulcan", said Coatl. "But these pendants must remain hidden. There are secret enemies opposed to anyone of royal lineage. I cannot tell you exactly whom they are, but if they suspect your true identity, your lives will be in danger. You must be cautious around everyone because they are everywhere. They might even be friends of your family."

Coatl leaned forward and put his hands solemnly on their shoulders. "Trust no one. These enemies will do anything to accomplish their mission--the elimination of all royal blood."

"Should we trust you?" asked Zotil slyly.

"An excellent question!" laughed Coatl. "You will have to determine the answer yourselves, just like everyone else. Now, you should also know that these pendants are endowed with special powers from past temple priests. Be careful."

"What powers?" asked Chela.

"In time, you will learn that for yourselves. Much of their power will depend upon your faith and how you use them," explained Coatl. "They can help you in unexpected ways. And there are many who will help you when they see those pendants. But once again, I must warn you that at times you will not know whom to trust. So be very selective about who sees the pendants!"

He abruptly stood up and started to walk away. He paused and turned to look at them.

"There will be a time when I will come for you."

Coatl stood there, silent, observing them. A shadowy figure flew quickly over their heads. Catching a glimpse of its long green tail feathers, Zotil guessed that it was a sacred quetzal bird. How strange that a bird of daylight would be flying around at night! When he looked at Coatl for his reaction, he nodded and smiled slightly. Zotil turned to look for the bird again, but it had disappeared.

Then Coatl disappeared too into the forest, a fading silvery glimmer swallowed up by the darkness. They sat there speechless, staring at the place where he had vanished. It seemed like a crazy dream, but the cool jade pendants touching their chests reminded them that at least part of the evening's strange events were true.

"You don't believe him nor trust him, do you?" asked Chela.

"No. I know he's a clever priest." replied Zotil. "But he's very mysterious and secretive and we need to learn more about him. Maybe he's mad...and dangerous. What do you think?"

"No matter what we believe or discover about him, we must cooperate for now because of his position as a powerful temple priest--even if he is a bit crazy," replied Chela.

"Okay," said Zotil as he twirled his jade pendant. "At least we got some nice gifts. I like the serpent's ruby eyes. Look how they sparkle!"

Chela snatched the pendant away from him and stuffed it back inside his shirt.

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"That's fine, but we better keep them hidden," warned Chela.

Chapter 2

Marvels of the Marketplace in Chichicastenango

"You mean everything that Coatl said about us last night was true?" asked Zotil incredulously. "Your knowledge and help in setting up that secret rendezvous at Utatlán? Our friends' contrived wager? Our noble lineage? Even you being our foster parents?"

Sitting on woven floor mats around the cooking fire in their home in Chichicastenango, Patut, their father, and Ticulta, their mother, nodded affirmatively. They knew this painful day of revelation would come, but years of conversations about how they would handle it did not adequately prepare them for it. They realized now that nothing could have prepared them well for this. It was agony.

"But how could you have deceived us for so long?" shouted Zotil angrily. "Don't tell me it was part of his crazy plan."

"What do you want me to say, Zotil?" replied Patut patiently. "Would you have me deny what we agreed to do for Coatl? Don't you see we were only trying to help our people and you?"

"But we are adults now. I can see why you didn't tell us when we were children. We have the right to know these things. Supposedly it is ***our*** lives that are in danger. Doesn't that fact merit telling us the truth?" demanded Zotil.

As the smoke curled upward through the hole in the thatched roof, Ticulta poured hot *maté* tea into ceramic cups. Perhaps the pleasant herbal tea would calm their nerves. She sighed. "Try to understand. We were only trying to protect you for those who would do you harm," answered Ticulta. "We also had to obey the instructions of the lords and priests. We serve them. We believe in preserving the royal lineage."

"Who cares if we are kin of the royal Quiché Maya? I don't want that nor did I choose it," replied Zotil testily as he gulped his tea.

As she was grinding the kernels into corn flour in the stone metate, Ticulta was concerned about how to deal with her agitated impetuous son. She placed the cornmeal into a wooden bowl and added water. As she cleaned the cooking stone, she motioned for Chela to prepare the dough.

Ticulta continued patiently, "This is what is most important -- we have always loved you. Your ancestry is irrelevant to us. We will always be your parents."

" Our real parents were murdered by some members of a anti-lord secret society?" asked Chela. She served herself more tea, hoping it would steady her inner turbulent emotions.

"Yes. I'm sorry," said Ticulta. "Coatl brought you to us when you were babies. Because we have worked in the temple for years, he trusted us. He devised a story that my cousin from the north suddenly died and you were sent here to me for adoption. Because your real parents lived and died in the south, no one here in Chichicastenango doubted the story. There, everyone was told that you went to live with relatives far away. Of course, there were some suspicions. But that was a long time ago."

"How did our real parents die?" asked Zotil.

Ticulta nodded to Patut to answer the question. Meanwhile, Chela had kneaded the dough and molded it into *tortillas*. As Ticulta placed them on hot stone to cook, she whispered a prayer of gratitude to the corn god, Yum Kax, for the gift of their most cherished food. Whenever she touched the soft dough, it reminded her of their belief that her people were originally created by the gods from corn dough. Now ironically, she thought, we are talking about creation -- and death -- within our own family.

"That's not important for you to know now. We have to worry about the future," replied Patut firmly. "There is a special meeting at the temple with the lords, priests, council and military leaders. We must decide what to do about the approaching invaders, the Spaniards."

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Ticulta served the warm tortillas with some chopped tomatoes, green peppers and onions. It was her husband's favorite meal. Maybe it will help him deal with all these problems, she hoped.

Patut was the most respected scribe, a *chilan*, in the principal temple in Chichicastenango. Because of their critical responsibilities and skills, the scribes were highly esteemed by the lords and the people. However, depending on the success of their translations of the ancient Mayan books and their interpretations of the future, the scribes' favor with the ruling lords was often unpredictable and tenuous.

"So are these strange invaders truly coming here?" asked Zotil. "What do you think you will do?"

"I don't know if they will come here. But if they do, we will be dealing with powerful invading forces which we have never faced before. There is much confusion and disagreement among the astronomers, priests and scribes about the meaning of recent omens," replied Patut. "I will let you know what happens in the meeting. I must go now. Ticulta, pass me some of those delicious tortillas and I'll eat them on my way to the temple."

Ticulta wrapped a few warm tortillas in a cloth and handed them to Patut as he left the room.

"Chela, we must gather our woven goods and prepare for marketplace. It is getting late and we need to make some sales today," added Ticulta.

Ticulta scurried about the house gathering up her weavings. She was a short stocky woman with a smooth bronze complexion and brown eyes. Her long straight black hair was neatly braided and hung loose against her back. Chela and she looked like twins. She had put on one of her own embroidered *huipiles*, a cotton blouse with multi-colored swirling floral designs. It was an easy way to advertise her designs and attract customers in the marketplace.

Ticulta was regarded as one of the best weavers in the area. She could weave and embroider anything--blankets, blouses, skirts, sashes, bags and hair decorations. Her special trademark signature, a red macaw parrot with a golden beak and black eyes, was woven into all her work. Many who admired her work instantly recognized her trademark crimson macaw and often bought her work just because of her reputation.

Tracing the little macaw woven into a sash, Chela asked, "Why did you pick the macaw as your special trademark for your work?"

"When I was a little girl, my mother took me with her to the forest to look for plants to make special dyes, including this fine red one for the macaw," explained Ticulta. "The macaws always swarmed around us while we were working, noisily squawking, watching everything we did. Of course, I admired their magnificent red and blue feathers. They were such attractive birds. But, they were so comical, playful and rambunctious that they reminded me of kids like myself. Maybe that's why I picked those crazy birds as my trademark."

"I love to see them too when we go to the forest," laughed Chela. "It's fun to feed them pumpkin seeds and watch how they crack them open with those big beaks."

Ticulta traced with affection one of her crimson macaw designs, pleased with her work. "Have you decided on your trademark design?"

"Not yet," said Chela. "I have been thinking about several ideas."

"Take your time," advised Ticulta. "It's an important decision. You must use your choice for the rest of your life."

"I know," laughed Chela, "and I am going to surprise you with my selection!"

"Oh really?" smiled Ticulta. "We'll see."

Following the centuries-old Mayan tradition, she had trained her daughter, Chela, in the art of weaving just as her mother had taught her. Each village in the Mayan realm developed its own particular style of weaving design. The effort and thought that were invested into a tapestry wove the community together into a binding design. Just seeing

these designs woven into everyday use items worn or used by the people reminded them of their common heritage.

Ticulta took Chela with her to the countryside whenever she searched for the sources of the dyes--tree bark, plants, rocks, fruits, mosses, lichens and insects. The crimson dye for her prized macaw trademark was extracted from a tiny insect that lived on cactus pads that when squashed, produced the vibrant red color.

Chela had quickly learned the basic steps of weaving; but, the most difficult skill of all -- arranging colors and creating designs -- was the weaver's ultimate challenge. This was the essence of weaving which separated the genius from the average weaver. Just as her mother searched for her own particular colors and patterns that satisfied her artistic creativity, Chela realized that she too would have to find that mysterious, harmonious blend of colors and designs that would please the soul -- and the buyer. She had experimented with different combinations but had not yet chosen her particular style.

As Ticulta stacked her weavings on top of two shawls for carrying in bundles, she remembered her prayers. She motioned for Chela to join her and they placed their hands on the weavings.

Dear Ix Chel, goddess of weavers,
we thank you for the ideas you put in our minds,
the skills you place in our hands
and the feelings that come from our hearts
which make these fine weavings
a manifestation of your beauty.

"Ahem! Didn't you forget something?" whispered Chela, nudging her mother.

"Oh yes. Of course," said Ticulta, winking her eyes.

And Ix Chel,
my daughter requests
that you help us make
good sales in the marketplace.

Chela added quickly,

Lots of sales,
dear goddess,
for we need the business.

Ticulta winced. They lifted their bundles, tied them around their necks and hoisted them on their backs. Ticulta noticed that Zotil was still upset.

"Zotil, please cut some firewood while we are gone to market," said Ticulta kindly. "It's a beautiful day for picking some chili peppers in the garden. It will do you good to work in the sunshine. When we return, we'll help you string them. For dinner, I'll make your favorite dessert -- cornbread with honey. Will you be okay?"

Zotil nodded without looking up. Ticulta could feel his distress; and she sighed, thinking, life must go on. Maybe the earth god would help them too today, she laughed to herself as she walked out the door.

As Ticulta and Chela carried their woven goods to the marketplace, they were excited by the anticipation of sales to a diverse mix of people. The marketplace of Chichicastenango was one of the best in the Mayan world. Once every month, thousands of people representing many Mayan tribes journeyed long distances to bring many different items to sell or trade. It was a wonderful opportunity to buy such unusual items like bananas and even iguanas from the distant jungle tribes. Chela always looked forward to her favorite -- *chicle*, chewing gum which was made from sap extracted from the *sapodilla* tree in the jungle.

Chichicastenango was a popular, respected city in the Mayan world, praised for its prosperity and beauty. Built among gently rolling hills, its brown adobe houses with thatched roofs gleamed in the sunlight. Every house had its own vegetable garden with corn, tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, greens and onions. Winding streets were shaded by the

fragrant *jacaranda* trees. The marketplace square was dominated by the traditional *ceiba* tree, a symbolic link of the everyday physical world to the spiritual world with its branches reaching to the heavens and its roots extending to the underworld.

Overlooking the marketplace, the immense main temple was majestic, towering over the city like a protective god. When visitors approached Chichicastenango from distant hills and caught their first glimpse of the protruding temple and the charming city nestled in the valley below, some wept for joy at such marvelous beauty. Chichicastenango was the pride of its citizens, the Quiché Maya.

When Ticulta and Chela reached the marketplace, it was already jammed with people. It was one of the largest crowds of the year. In the summer, there were many more vegetable products to sell. The sellers had placed their items on the ground and were already engaged in frantic haggling with customers in coming to an agreement on the price or trade. Chela sometimes didn't bargain as hard as she could simply because she was distracted by meeting so many interesting new people. But, when she was focused, she was a very competent buyer and seller.

Ticulta found a spot for their items and immediately arranged them in neat stacks on the ground so that they were attractively displayed. She counted out fifteen *cacao* beans and passed them to Chela. They could be used to buy any item in the marketplace. She also passed her a woven bag, several sashes and woven hair bands for bartering purposes.

"Chela, buy a plump rabbit, some mangos and salt," said Ticulta. "We also need some candles and incense for special prayers. Don't be anxious to pay the first offer for it is early in the day. Be patient and strike a good bargain. Watch out for counterfeit cacao beans."

"If I am swindled, should I return?" laughed Chela. "I feel the pressure of the master bargainer -- my mother."

"Everyone gets swindled once. Remember that. Just don't let it happen drastically -- or often," teased her mother.

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Chela placed the small beans in a tiny woven bag and hung it around her neck so that the marketplace thieves couldn't snatch her bag. She tucked it inside her robe. When she accidentally touched her serpent pendant necklace, she recalled the strange events the previous night at Utatlan. She was lured by the pendant's smooth cool jade texture. She reached inside her robe and lifted it out slightly, caressing it momentarily with her fingers. She was growing fond of her tiny charm. Then Coatl's warning about displaying it openly in public shot through her brain. As she dropped it back inside her robe, she glanced around at the crowd. Had anyone seen the pendant? She scanned nearby faces, many engaged in bargaining, chatting, and eating. But some people seemed to be watching her. What a fool I have been, she thought! That wasn't like me to be so careless. Are they still looking at me? She moved quickly, looked downward, avoiding all eye contact and tried to look like any silly young woman looking for purchases at the marketplace.

Chela walked past piles of gourds, flint knives, pottery and woven baskets. Looking around, she was satisfied that no one was paying any particular attention to her amidst the loud haggling over prices. She walked over to the section of the market featuring religious items -- charms, dried herbs, ointments, flint blades for sacrifices, spines for bloodletting, wild birds for sacrifices, figurines, prayers written on parchment and special jewelry with images of the gods. There were many competitors and lots of items to choose. Religion was always a prosperous business, she thought, and yielded easier profits than laborious weaving. Perhaps I should weave some images of the gods into my designs, she figured, then I could increase my sales. She noticed candles, incense and incense burners in several areas. She picked up one small candle and examined it.

"Six candles will cost you three beans," remarked the vendor.

Noticing the particular design of his red sash, Chela knew that he was from the neighboring Cakchiquel Maya tribe. She hesitated a moment, inspected another candle, then replied."I notice that this beeswax seems to be poor in quality. It flakes too easily. I will give you one bean."

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"You are correct. They are not the best quality. The best candles, of course, are more expensive; but these are very good. They will honor the gods properly. My final price is two beans," countered the man as he casually straightened his sash.

"Give me eight candles for that price and you have a deal," said Chela.

She dropped the candle, pretended to be distracted by a neighboring vendor's candles, and took several small steps in that direction. The vendor rearranged the candles, saying nothing.

Chela stopped and turned. "Well?"

"It is a deal," replied the vendor reluctantly. "This has been a slow day and I must make some sales."

She passed him the two cacao beans. The vendor quickly pressed one between his fingers to test it. Counterfeit beans were often hollowed out and filled with sand or clay. Anyone could be fooled by a clever counterfeiter. The vendor place one bean between his teeth and chomped down on it. Satisfied that the beans were authentic, he passed her the candles.

"May the god of merchants, Ek Chuah, bless you," said the merchant.

"Thank you. And you, too." replied Chela.

Pleased with the purchase and feeling more self-confident, she quickly concluded another bargain for some incense. When she was confident about her bargaining skills and trusted a vendor, Chela preferred to negotiate as many transactions as possible with the same person.

A wandering group of minstrels approached, playing flutes, turtle shell rattles and drums while singing silly songs to coax a few beans from the people for their entertainment. The leader skipped around the crowd, singing:

I went to the marketplace to buy some meat
but I bought instead a liquor treat.
When I went home that night

my wife beat me up in a fight!

As the crowd laughed, one flute player danced around, jiggling his hat for donations. As much as she enjoyed their performance, Chela decide to save her beans to buy some chewing gum. Later, if she had any beans left, she would return for another show and might even commission a song about weavers.

Chela wandered around the food area of the market. Women sat on stools behind baskets filled with fruits, nuts and vegetables. She admired the colorful piles of tomatoes, avocados, papayas, corn and mangos. The multiple shapes and colors were attractive and even artistic. Perhaps I should create a special fruit design for *huipil* blouses, she wondered. A lot of women would buy that design, she concluded. Today she was wearing a ***huipil*** with one of her mother's popular macaw designs. It's time that I establish my own reputation with my own special trademark, she decided, as she finished a purchase of mangos.

As she passed stacks of sweet potatoes and manioc roots, she heard the boisterous Yucatec Mayans making rude comments to passing women. These coastal merchants from the lowlands had a trade monopoly on many items such as tobacco, medicinal herbs, vanilla, exotic birds, iguanas and chewing gum. They also sold slaves captured in wars against distant enemy tribes. When she saw some despondent bound captives in bamboo cages, she felt pity for them. Despite the prevalence of the custom, she could not approve of human slavery.

Even though she disliked the Yucatecs, Chela had to negotiate with them if she wanted chewing gum. They controlled the area with the source tree, the *sapodilla*. So, she braced herself for some distasteful bargaining.

"Hello there, beautiful young Quiche lady! What can I sell you today?" hailed one Yucatec merchant.

"Come with me, pretty one, and I will give you this lovely toucan," joked another, holding up the cute banana-beaked bird. "What do you say?"

"I say this bird and you look like brothers!" remarked Chela with a sly grin. "You both have the same noses."

The Yucatecs laughed loudly and the bird vendor continued. "Ah, my lovely one, surely you would love me for my manly qualities."

"I surely would -- if I could find any," shot back Chela as the others roared at her bold mockery. "Now, I don't have time for this nonsense. I want to buy some chewing gum."

"Of course," said the gum vendor. "I will sell it to you cheap because I like you -- and you are as sweet as this gum. Shall I chew it and soften it for you a bit?"

"Shall I *soften* your mouth with my fist?" threatened Chela, as she lifted her fist and moved toward him.

The gum vendor backed away and Chela quickly grabbed some gum off the stack and tossed him a cacao bean.

The startled gum vendor recovered quickly. "Oh baby, I'd rather have you!"

While the laughter of the Yucatecs followed her, Chela admitted to herself that despite their bold flirtations, they were amusing and jovial. She'd rather match wits with them than the solemn dull Chontal Mayans who controlled the salt trade. No highlander enjoyed bargaining with these salt merchants from the northeastern lowlands by the sea. They were stubborn hagglers, emotionless as their salt blocks. But everyone needed the salt so there was no choice but to deal with them. She decided to conclude the transaction as quickly as possible.

The Chontal Maya stood motionless and silent behind neat towers of salt blocks. Chela waited for him to say something, but he remained silent. She pointed at five salt blocks.

"How much?" asked Chela in the few Chontal words she knew. The Chontal refused to learn the Quiche Maya dialect.

The vendor stuck out two fingers. She nodded in agreement, passed him the cacao beans and placed the salt blocks in her bag. She hurried away, relieved with the quick purchase.

Next, Chela walked into the animal section of the market where she loved seeing rare creatures from the mountains and jungle. There were the common turkeys, armadillos, rabbits and squirrels in bamboo cages. Alongside, dark-green iguanas and furry coati mundis were tied to stakes with strings around their necks. Parrots, macaws, canaries and toucans chatted noisily from their cages. But she laughed most when she saw the playful monkey chattering.

As she was thinking of purchasing a rabbit, she noticed the vendor staring at her. She was an old woman with gray hair but beautiful smooth skin and penetrating brown eyes. As a good weaver, Chela's eyes quickly moved to her exquisitely woven blouse. Although it was obviously an old one, its colors were still vibrant. It was embroidered with ears of green corn with yellow silk protruding from the tips. While admiring the corn pattern, she was startled to see a tiny green macaw design. It was exactly like her mother's trademark crimson macaw except for the green color. Aware of Chela's admiration of her blouse, the old woman nodded politely and smiled. Chela sensed something familiar about her, but, she could not recall having met her before.

"Do you wish to make a purchase, young lady?" said the old woman softly while staring intently at Chela.

"I'm not sure. I have to check my beans," replied Chela.

Chela felt somewhat uncomfortable with the old woman's steady gaze. She didn't know why. Rather clumsily, Chela pulled out her bag of beans, but her pendant accidentally popped out also. She quickly stuffed the pendant back inside her robe.

Then Chela noticed a large man slip silently behind her. Without warning, he grabbed her with one arm around her waist, then locked the other arm around her neck. His powerful arm pressed so forcefully against her throat that it squeezed the air out of her.

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She struggled, gasping for breath. Unable to scream for help, she frantically tried to kick him. But he dragged her behind a vendor's stall. Desperate, she flailed at him with her arms, hoping to scratch his eyes. But it was hopeless.

Now he began to squeeze her throat even harder so that Chela couldn't breathe anymore. Dizzy and disoriented, her strength drained away. Finally she succumbed, no longer able to resist. While sounds and images blurred, she heard him whispering in her ear.

"Now is the time for you to die. Your noble blood will dry up, and, like dust, be blown away by the wind," he said maliciously.

As her eyes began to close and the light started to fade, she thought she noticed a small shadow pass in front of her.

"That's it. Relax," advised the assailant. "It won't be long now and you won't feel...*ah-h-h-h-h-h!*"

"Die, you monster!" hissed another voice with contempt.

Slowly the attacker's grip around her neck relaxed and he pulled his other arm away from her waist. Then Chela heard him grunt, followed by a low groan. After he had released her completely, she fell to the ground, gasping for air. Still in a daze, she felt his body slump against her side. The next few seconds were confusing. She heard a pleasant voice coaxing her to breathe. Someone cradled her head. She heard a final moan from the fallen man beside her.

"Breathe, young lady. You will be okay," said the voice with encouragement.

Gradually, her vision sharpened, she looked up and recognized the old woman vendor.

"What happened?" asked Chela, sitting up and still struggling to breathe.

"He tried to kill you," replied the old woman calmly, "but he is dead now. He will not harm you."

"But if he wanted to rob me, he didn't have to kill me," answered Chela, horrified, as she looked at the dead man lying on the ground.

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"Oh, he wasn't trying to rob you. He knew exactly who you are and he wished to kill you," she replied. Then she quickly touched Chela's chest precisely where the pendant was hung. "You have been careless, young lady. He saw your pendant. He had been stalking you. He knew you are kin to the lords."

The old woman's statement shocked Chela. What did she know about her royal ancestry? The old woman reached over to the dead man and pulled a knife out of his back. Already his robe was stained with blood.

"Quick. Help me drag him over by the baskets behind the trees and we'll cover him with them," ordered the old woman. "Hurry!"

"It was you who killed him? " asked Chela incredulously. "But you seem too old and frail. How did you do it?"

"This helped a lot," answered the old woman, holding up the bloody knife.

Chela recognized it immediately as a type of sacrificial knife that the high priests used in special religious ceremonies in the temple. She had seen priests sacrifice animals many times. The blade was carved from black obsidian with swirling small specks of white quartz and jade. But this knife's unusual feature was a carved fierce jaguar with flickering ruby eyes and triangular white shell teeth. With its paws clinging to the handle, the jaguar figure crouched, ready to attack. Recoiling slightly from its frightening sneer, Chela recognized it as a frightful symbol for a god of war. Then she wondered why an old woman in the marketplace possessed such an extraordinary weapon. Did she buy it? Or did she steal it?

As they dragged the dead man away and covered him with baskets, the old woman noticed Chela staring at the knife.

"It is not an ordinary knife. As a temple scribe's daughter, you would recognize this as a sacrificial knife, but it's an ancient one, something which you've never seen before," the old woman commented. "But it is more than a fancy, rare old knife decorated with pretty jewels."

The old woman wiped the blood off the knife on the ground, grabbed Chela by the wrist and pulled her closer. She placed the knife in Chela's palm then closed her hands over it tightly.

"You must take this knife for your own protection. Like your attacker lying dead there on the ground, there are others who would wish to harm you. But this knife will also help you in other ways you cannot anticipate," she added seriously. "I know you have the courage to use it when necessary. I can see that you come from sturdy blood kin. This knife was endowed with mystical powers by ancient priests long ago. It has been secretly passed on from generation to generation with a special priesthood. I cannot explain to you now why it is in my possession. I will say only that you have been designated to receive it. It is your destiny. But I warn you now that this knife can control you. Once you have felt its power, be careful -- or you will become its victim. Don't allow its deceptive evil power overwhelm you. Be carefull"

"But who are you?" asked Chela as she reluctantly held the knife. "Why did you save my life?"

"I am a friend. You have many other secret friends who will help you," she added quickly as she stood up. "No more questions. There is no time to explain anything else. You must go before anyone else comes looking for the dead assailant. Now, go!"

"But, I don't understand why..." said Chela, bewildered.

"Go!" interrupted the old woman, giving her a shove.

Chela took a few hesitant steps then stopped. She had not thanked the woman for saving her life. But when she turned around, the old woman had disappeared. She glanced once more at the knife, then slipped it inside her robe underneath the sash around her waist. She decided she would keep the knife a secret from everyone, even her mother.

Then, as she felt the knife touching her skin, she felt a slight tingling sensation. Or perhaps it was her playful imagination, stimulated by an old woman's claim that this bizarre knife had been endowed by temple priests with special mystical powers.

Chapter 3

A Perilous Prophecy

"Lords, council members, advisors, assistants, please come to order. We must begin the council meeting now." Cauac, the chief advisor to the lord warrior king, Lord Mountain Eagle, scanned the faces of the council members, gathering their attention. "Lord Mountain Eagle," announced Cauac solemnly.

The council members and audience bowed their heads reverently as they watched Lord Mountain Eagle, ruler of the territory which surrounded Chichicastenango, thumping his wooden royal staff as he moved slowly to his throne. His royal emblem of a fierce eagle emblazoned on his cloak contrasted sharply with his plodding steps. In the large room of the great temple of Chichicastenango, this was the most impressive gathering of the powerful and influential Quiché Maya ever. Just by scanning the room filled with wealthy lords, respected priests and important commanders, it was obvious that this was an emergency session. As everyone watched their aged ruler take his seat on a stone bench with a chiseled eagle emblem, his solemn wrinkled face and stooped shoulders reflected not only the weary burden of past problems but also the seriousness of onrushing events. Even the blue, green and white feathers in his headdress even drooped. Lord Mountain Eagle's deliberate gait indicated a critical challenge that he had never faced before in his life. Would the old lord find the energy to lead them once again?

As he observed the lord, Patut wondered if his frail health could withstand this ordeal. He knew that there were many younger, stronger and ambitious participants there, both of royal and common lineage, who would like to rule in his place. Some feared that even the anti-lord forces might even assassinate Lord Mountain Eagle in an attempt to unite the people behind a commoner. But the heavily-guarded Lord Mountain Eagle was aware of

this constant danger and was not worried by it. He should be more concerned about his personal safety, thought Patut.

"My people, we have some difficult decisions to make today." Lord Mountain Eagle addressed the assembly in a voice so weak that some could not hear him. "Our priests and astronomers will report to us on recent omens and ancient prophecies which they have studied. Then our chief military commander, Tecum, will give us his advice on how to deal with the approaching enemy. There is much to consider and I know there are plenty of intelligent advisors in this room, anxious to express an opinion. Your old lord is grateful to be sitting while listening to all of you."

The lord mumbled these last words to himself in a mocking way, but Patut, seated nearby, heard them. The lord had always been a shrewd judge of human character, and considering the diverse forceful personalities assembled in that room, he would need all his leadership and diplomatic skills to control and guide this anxious challenging group.

Patut noticed Tecum, the respected military commander, standing next to his loyal able assistant, Hurling Lance. Next to the lord, he saw Lady Water Hyacinth, his wife, and Lady Water Lily, his daughter. Lady Water Hyacinth rarely spoke in public and probably would not do so today. She preferred advising her husband in private. Their daughter, Lady Water Lily, was an intelligent, beautiful, charming young woman with bright inquisitive eyes. Since he had already lost three sons in wars with other Mayan city-states, she was the only remaining direct heir to the lord. Looking at the royal family, Patut felt sympathy for them as they tried to survive many ambitious contenders to the throne, waiting for the right opportunity to seize power.

Scanning the room, Patut was surprised to see his son, Zotil, in the corner. So, he has neglected his chores to sneak into the council meeting, he noted. Should he motion for him to leave immediately? No, sighed Patut, this critical session will be a good education for him, and it might help him adjust better to the surprising revelation about his noble ancestry and true parents. He knew that Zotil was overwhelmed with feelings of betrayal and anger.

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It had always been difficult to control his independent-minded son. Yes, let him stay to witness this display of ruling power of Chichicastenango's leadership, or, should he say, the attempts to cleverly manipulate power by ambitious leaders? Then his eyes met those of Coatl, who smiled at him, acknowledging Patut's probing survey of the council members. They both noticed that one of the most ambitious contenders for the throne, Lord Nakum, was about to make his initial -- and always dramatic -- address to the council.

"My Lord Mountain Eagle," began Lord Nakum as he straightened his golden plumed headdress and white cotton breechcloth. "I understand the white invaders are merely a day's march from our city. We must decide immediately how to deal with these strangers. I fear we have not explored all the possibilities of negotiating with these men."

"Yes, Lord Nakum," answered Lord Mountain Eagle politely, tugging on his jade earring. "What do you suggest?"

"I propose that we send a distinguished delegation to meet them outside our city, offer them worthy gifts, then impress them with descriptions of our fortifications and a show of our military forces," replied Lord Nakum in a satisfied way, relishing his chance to speak before such an impressive assembly. "With skillful negotiations, a mutually-satisfying peaceful agreement could be concluded. I would be happy to personally lead such a mission."

"That is a courageous offer, Lord Nakum," replied Lord Mountain Eagle, understanding the lord's desire to win approval and ultimately more power from the ruling council through some impressive action. "It shall be considered. Will Lord Nakum carry weapons himself? Does he wish a large military escort?"

"I must go unarmed to demonstrate my peaceful intentions, my lord," answered Lord Nakum, seizing the moment to flash his bravery. Then, considering the practical aspect of his own safety against a dangerous opponent, he added a special condition. "But, in order to persuade the invaders to reject any possible idea of attack, I request the best warriors to accompany me."

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Lord Mountain Eagle nodded and then whispered aside to his wife, "Of course, our bold lord is wise enough to protect his own noble pompous personage."

Overhearing the sarcastic comment, Patut laughed to himself, admiring the lord's clever wit. But Patut realized as well as everyone else that the younger Lord Nakum nurtured a growing ambition to replace Lord Mountain Eagle. In fact, there were rumors of a foiled overthrow attempt secretly led by Lord Nakum. There was never any direct evidence of his involvement, so he had never even been accused of anything traitorous. .

Observing at the others in the room, Patut admired Shele, a principal advisor to both the lord and lady and a well-educated daughter of a prominent merchant. This beautiful young woman was regarded by many as an intelligent, capable loyal advisor.

"Lord Nakum," began Shele, "What if your peaceful negotiations are not successful?"

"I know, counselor, that you want me to acknowledge that it would be better to surprise attack with a well-armed force of Quiché warriors," answered Lord Nakum. "But I am hoping that our negotiations will be successful."

"I did not make a suggestion yet," replied Shele calmly. "Does my lord believe he can intimidate the conquerors of the mighty Aztecs?"

"Would you prefer to commit us to a bloody war without any effort to avoid it?" asked Lord Nakum with a sweeping gesture of disbelief. "I would prefer to make at least one gesture at peaceful negotiations with these strangers -- a people whom none of us have ever seen."

"I disagree with Lord Nakum," interrupted Tecum firmly as he stood up. His gold arm bands reflected the flickering flames of the surrounding mounted wall torches. "It is a waste of time to negotiate with these intruders. They can only understand one message -- that which we send with our lances."

"Words, of course, are not part of your jurisdiction or abilities," replied Lord Nakum in an official manner. But skillfully used by diplomats, they might prevent needless bloodshed."

"Words skillfully used by you, I assume?" asked Tecum.

"Exactly," agreed Lord Nakum in a haughty manner, then as an afterthought, he added, "with my lord's permission, of course."

"Words often fail when dealing with formidable foes who respect only powerful weapons," noted Tecum. "I think we should attack first."

"Led by you, of course," said Lord Nakum, waving a hand decorated with impressive turquoise rings.

Ignoring him and addressing the council, Tecum declared forcefully, "Successful negotiations have always been backed by military power. That is the way it has always been. That is the way it should be now!"

"Would our brave commander not even agree that we should at least have one meeting outside the city with these invaders? There is nothing to lose. We might even enlist them as allies against our traditional enemies," responded Lord Nakum. "Surely the commander would admit that is a worthy possibility to explore."

"Ha! Ridiculous!" hooted Tecum, already flashing his well-known impatience and temper. "No, I would not admit it. This is not a time for talk. This is a time to ready our city's defenses and warriors. We must prepare weapons, not words."

"Enough!" ordered Lord Mountain Eagle as he raised his eagle staff and signaled for the debate to stop. He put his head down and groaned, and whispered to Lady Water Hyacinth. "Oh-h-h, I'm too old to listen to this ridiculous bantering. I've heard these arguments many times before."

Like many others present in the room, Zotil admired the dashing handsome commander of the lord's forces. He sympathized with Tecum's disdain and impatience in

discussing military affairs with uniformed non-combatants such as Lord Nakum. Tecum was simply a man of action.

Lord Mountain Eagle rubbed the wrinkled skin on his hands, thinking about all the wars he had fought, the lives lost and villages destroyed. Sometimes a ruler must command in ways he would like to avoid. I cannot remove any of these wrinkles, he laughed, and there will be more of them.

"Quit rubbing your hand, my lord, and say something!" whispered Lady Water Hyacinth.

Lord Mountain Eagle looked up at his wife. She was staring at him, waiting for his reply to the assembly and, as usual, trying to read his mind. She always seems to know what I am thinking, he smiled to himself. It is time to give up the throne, he decided, something he wanted to do years ago. But his ambitious wife enjoyed the privileges of power too much. He looked at his daughter, Lady Water Lily, more talented than any of his dead sons. The traditional ways of the Quiché Maya would probably prevent a woman from becoming a ruler. True, other Mayan tribes had been ruled by female rulers, but he didn't believe it would happen here among the traditional Quiché Maya. There were too many pretenders to the throne who would not allow it and many of them were present in the room. No, his daughter's best chance was to marry into another lord's family and help her husband rule. Secretly, he had already negotiated an alliance with another powerful noble's family and he had arranged the marriage. Now he had to carefully pick the appropriate moment for the marriage announcement and inform his daughter. He hoped that she would approve the marriage, but considering her independent ways, he was not sure. He would rely on his wife to handle it.

Lord Mountain Eagle looked again at his wife wondering if she could read his mind now. Finally he surveyed the audience, noticing their anticipation.

" Lord Nakum, you may select a delegation and meet the enemy outside the city, " announced Lord Mountain Eagle, "but, be cautious. Perhaps with your considerable diplomatic skills, you may be able to reason with these people and help us avoid war."

As he observed the satisfied smile on Lord Nakum's face, Lord Mountain Eagle also noticed the disappointment of Tecum, the classic warrior. I have lived to know many Tecum, thought Lord Mountain Eagle. For the people, the brave noble warrior would always be a hero -- as long as he won some significant battles. He sighed to himself, thinking that the people must have a hero, the warriors must have a leader, and a ruler must have a commander. Had it not always been that way? Well, he sighed, he would give Tecum his chance to be a hero.

"Tecum, our brave commander, I order you to make all necessary preparations to defend our city," said Lord Mountain Eagle raising his voice so everyone in the room could hear him. "Enlist as many citizens as you need. In case negotiations fail, be prepared to attack and drive these invaders from our land."

"But, my lord, we can't..." protested Lord Nakum.

"Say no more," interrupted Lord Mountain Eagle, raising his staff again for silence. "I already know what you wish to say. I have listened carefully and considered both points of view."

"My lord," spoke Coatl firmly, stepping out from beside a statue of the god, Itzamna. "As your chief religious advisor, I propose another delegation, but, this one should venture to our neighboring city-state, Huehuetenango, to forge an alliance with the Cakchiquel Maya. To be prepared for these invaders, we must unite our Mayan factions and overcome our past differences. As you know, Sequixpec, the Cakchiquel high priest, is an old colleague of mine."

There were some nods of approval in the audience, indicating some agreement for the proposal. But undoubtedly others did not trust Coatl's motives, suspecting that there

was more to this proposed diplomatic mission than was revealed. Lord Mountain Eagle wondered too if Coatl had something else in his mind.

Noting Lord Mountain Eagle's hesitancy, Coatl continued. "I shall choose the members of the delegation to help me negotiate a pact with our neighbors. Together we could convince the Cakchiquel tribe to forget our past wars against each other and join forces against a common foe. With your permission, we could leave tomorrow."

"That is a good idea," added Lord Nakum quickly. "I propose that we send my lord's assistant and ruling council member, Cauac, with you."

"A worthy suggestion, Lord Nakum, but I am sure that Cauac has critical duties here with the council," countered Coatl, trying to check Lord Nakum's attempt to place his close ally as a watchdog on his actions. They had been competitors for the lord's attention many times before.

"I will be happy to accompany Coatl to Huehuetenango," interjected Cauac quickly. "As our lord's principal counselor, I am sure that I can represent both the council and him faithfully and accurately."

Zotil was amused by the battle of wits between Coatl and Lord Nakum. Compared to his dynamic demeanor the previous night at Utatlan, Coatl was remarkably restrained. But then again, Zotil figured, Coatl was probably capable of masterfully performing many roles, adapting to whatever the situation required.

If I didn't have to sort out all the competing and intertwining schemes, thought Lord Mountain Eagle, this match of wits would be entertaining. In my long life, I have seen all possible manipulations. Has every ruler in every Mayan realm endured such plotting?

"Coatl will lead the delegation to Huehuetenango--with Cauac's assistance. However, I will add some other members to these delegations" ordered Lord Mountain Eagle. "Bolon Sky, our court astronomer priest, will accompany Coatl. He, too, can be persuasive in dealing with Sequixpec. Since they both are astronomer priests, they speak the same language -- that of the stars and the sky, the realm of the gods. I also wish Shele to

accompany the mission. Perhaps with her clever charm, she can sway some Cakchiquel minds."

Lord Mountain Eagle winked aside at Shele. Coatl, Lord Nakum, Bolon Sky, Cauac and Shele bowed respectfully.

"Now, our *chilan*, Patut, has been studying prophecies in the ancient books to help guide us. What have you found, Patut?" asked Lord Mountain Eagle.

All attention turned to Patut. He felt uncomfortable, especially considering what he was about to reveal. For months he had been searching through the ancient books, some a thousand years old, hoping to find some positive omens which would guide them in seeking divine intervention. Patut's lean body and thin face accentuated the general gaunt and haggard look of a man who had spent many hours studying the folded parchments. There were some prophecies that seemed applicable to their situation, but he was not sure. He needed more time for consultation with his colleagues, the priests and the astronomers, but there was little time left.

There was one prophecy he found that especially worried him. He had not even consulted Bolon Sky or Coatl about it as he should have. He found it in the book of Chilam Balam, one of the most respected collections of history, stories and prophecies of the Quiché Maya. When he arose to speak, he momentarily considered hiding what he had found, but he knew that he had to reveal the prophecy.

"Members of the council, lords and advisors," began Patut. "I have spent many hours searching the books of the ancient ones for guidance. There are several prophecies that the *chilanes* need to consider more carefully, but we agree there is one we must present to you now. It is taken from the respected book written by our Quiché ancestors, Chilam Balam. It states:

Eat, eat while there is bread,
Drink, drink, while there is water;

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When a blight shall wither the land,
When a cloud shall arise,
When a mountain shall be lifted up
When a strong man shall seize the city,
When ruin shall fall upon all things,
When the tender leaf shall be destroyed
When eyes shall be closed in death;
When there shall be three signs on a tree,
Father, son, and grandson hanging dead on the same tree
When the battle flag shall be raised,
And the people scattered abroad in the forests.

No one spoke. No one made a sound. Everyone pondered the prophecy. After hearing such ominous words, no one wanted to speak first. They waited for the Lord Mountain Eagle to speak.

Zotil admired the direct manner in which his father revealed a controversial prophecy. He wondered if Patut was completely disclosing all that he had discovered because he knew that his father was the best interpreter of Mayan glyphs in the room.

"My lord, these words could refer to many situations from any age, past, present or future," noted Lord Nakum, "but I see nothing there that can guide us or give us a clue for a plan of action. What does the esteemed *ah kin mai*, our astronomer forecaster have to say?"

"There are many ways to interpret the words," answered Bolon Sky solemnly. "If you see impending doom there, then you may be correct -- from your point of view. If you find a message of hope there, then so be it. If you see the path of action we must take, then perhaps we should follow it."

"Ah-h-h, the chief astronomer is as vague as ever...and of no help," commented Cauac sourly.

"If the chief counselor will kindly allow me to finish," interrupted Bolon Sky, "I was going to add that we are approaching the U'ayeb period in the calendar, the five unlucky days. If these strangers arrive here during that special time, it could be a bad omen for our people. The gods may be against us."

"Or it could be a bad omen for the strangers and the gods may be against them!" countered Cauac, dramatically waving his arm for emphasis.

"Whatever the prophecy means, we still must seek the gods' intervention and the proper way to honor them," added Coatl.

"It changes nothing. They are words from the past," stated Tecum loudly. "We live in the present."

"I agree with Tecum," said Lady Water Lily, the lord's daughter, who could not restrain herself any longer. "Who cares what an ancient prophecy says? So what if it is true? How do we know for certain what will happen?"

A few were shocked by her boldness and sudden entry into the debate. Lady Water Lily then stood up to address the council. Her bright red huipil was embroidered with water lilies -- the symbol of abundance. Her jade necklace was quite simple but unusually designed with the addition of white caracol sea shells. A turquoise headband with dangling silver water lilies wrapped around her forehead and neatly tied her long beautiful black hair.

"I say to you that no matter what the circumstances," continued Lady Water Lily with her confidence growing, "we must defend our land. For generations to come, it must be known that the Maya fought valiantly to preserve their traditions, their cities, their people and their way of life. If we do not defend ourselves, then our only heritage for the future will be shame. Even if the prophecy is fulfilled, we will survive and will be responsible for the future."

There was a moment of silence, then a few spontaneous cheers began which grew into loud applause. Lord Mountain Eagle was never more proud of his daughter. Now he felt even more assured that she had many of the qualities necessary to be an effective ruler. Perhaps he had been prophetic after all when he had named her at birth, Water Lily -- a traditional symbol of royal power. He looked at the faces in the room wondering if they could accept a woman as their ruler...*soon*.

"What do you say about the prophecy, *chilan*?" questioned Lord Mountain Eagle, addressing Patut.

"Our future has not yet been written, my lord," responded Patut simply, looking directly at the lord. The audience waited to see if Patut would add anything else, but he remained silent.

Lord Mountain Eagle smiled. "Yes, Patut, you are correct. Our future has not been written, but it is interesting to wonder what words will be written, is it not?"

As Patut nodded slightly in agreement, Lord Mountain Eagle pondered his own words for a second and was even amused by their irony. Then he concluded, "No matter what interpretation is given to this prophecy or any omen, we must contend with the present. We must prepare for the future, whatever it will be...*now*! Everyone has a task to perform. We have much work to do. This council will meet again tomorrow to update the progress. This council meeting is finished."

Lord Mountain Eagle stood up and walked briskly out of the room, followed by Lady Water Hyacinth and Lady Water Lily.

As he watched Lord Mountain Eagle march energetically away, Patut decided that there was still some spark left in the aged ruler. Noticing the glint in the lord's eyes as he left, he wouldn't be surprised if the clever old ruler had some surprises planned for the council.

Temple of the Giant Jaguar
Tikal National Park
Guatemala

Built during the golden age of Tikal(300-900 A.D.) early in the 8th C., the Temple of the Giant Jaguar stands 147 feet high on the Great Square. The temple is built on a terraced pyramid based on many platforms. Internally the pyramid consisted primarily of rubble. Its original stucco outer covering was painted red and its crest was multi-colored, some of which has endured today. Situated on top of the summit, the temple itself consisted of several small narrow rooms and a carved crowning crest higher than the building. Carved stelas representing various rulers and gods of Tikal's classical era surrounded its base.

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Lowland and highland terrain have set their distinctive stamps on Maya life from the beginning, with Mexican influence especially strong in the ancient highland communities. Copán and Palenque mark approximate limits of the Maya lowlands, which extend through the Petén and the Yucatán Peninsula. Here Classic Maya civilization reached its dazzling zenith of accomplishment.

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Still in its original location in Tikal is Altar 5, one of the most beautifully carved pieces at that site. Two elaborately dressed men kneel in conference beside a skull and a stack of thighbones.

Search for Tikal: Lost City of the Maya

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 Ritual at the Ruins of Utatlan

An aged high priest of the temple of the Quiche Maya, Coatl, journeys to the isolated, abandoned ruins of the once formidable religious ceremonial site, Utatlan. In a desperate plea for help from the gods against the marauding Spaniards, he summons every bit of strength imploring for divine intercession. But he is also nagged by troubling self-doubts concerning his own abilities and even the will and power of his gods. Amidst a tempest at the revered temple portal--the traditional meeting place between two worlds of gods and the priests, he believes the gods answer his plea and advise him on a plan for handling many dilemmas.

Hidden behind a stela, two youths, Zotil and Chela--brother and sister, attempt to win a wager with friends by spying on the old priest. They are shocked to learn that they have actually been part of a previous secret plan of Coatl and have been tricked into a secret rendezvous with him. They are startled to find that they have foster parents and that they are actually of royal blood, descended from great Mayan lords. Coatl attempts to enlist them in a secret mission to journey to Tikal, the fabled ancient jungle city, which many believe to be either a myth or abandoned ruins. He shows them ancient Mayan parchments which reveal a hidden cache of Mayan treasures; but, it is known to few, not even the high priest of Tikal, Amachel. He explains to the youths that because of their royal ancestry their lives are in danger not only from the Spaniards but also a secret society among the Mayans who are dedicated to eliminating all nobility.

Arrogant, brash but intelligent, Zotil is skeptical and is critical of the aristocracy of the lords. At first, he believes Coatl to be a charlatan; but soon is impressed by his knowledge and skills. Still, he does not trust him. Chela is also skeptical but is more willing to cooperate, respecting the reputation and influence of the high priest. Both are lured by the mysterious strange tale and agree to follow along temporarily until they learn more.If nothing else, they concede to curiosity.

Chapter 2 The Marvels of Marketplace at Chichicastenango

Zotil and Chela learn that their real parents were murdered by anti-lord forces and that they were secretly placed with their foster parents, Ticulta and Patut, by temple priests, including Coatl.

Ticulta and Chela take their fine weavings to trade at the great marketplace in their magnificent city of Chichicastenango, a revered cultural, religious and economic center of the Quiche Maya. The marvelous marketplace unites tribes and products from all over the Mayan lands--macaws, chewing gum, salt, herbs, toucans, chocolate, incense etc. and also provides a social meeting place. It is a joyful, entertaining and enlightening experience for all, including Chela.

While haggling for goods there, Chela is attacked by a mysterious assailant, apparently a member of the anti-lord forces who somehow discovered her identity as a descendant of royal lords. Near death, Chela is saved surprisingly by an old woman, a vendor, who kills the attacker with an ancient sacrificial knife decorated with a carved jaguar.
She then gives the knife to Chela for protection but warns her of its reckless powers. The old woman disappears without identifying herself leaving a perplexed Chela with a strange weapon and many questions.

Chapter 3 The Perilous Prophecy

The principal lord of Chichicastenango and the Quiche Maya, Lord Mountain Eagle, summons the ruling council to the temple to decide a course of action in case of the Spaniards' arrival. Plagued by old age infirmities, too many wars and self-doubts, Lord Mountain Eagle plans to yield his power soon. He resolves to rule a little bit longer to contend with the present crisis and to arrange for a marriage of royalty for his only surviving direct heir, his talented daughter, Lady Water Lily. Considering her potentially to be a very capable ruler, Lord Mountain Eagle nevertheless acknowledges that traditional male supremacy would probably prevent her from inheriting his power; so he is determined to align his royal lineage with another royal family.

In dealing with the approaching Spaniards, various council members advise appeasement, war, negotiations, alliances with neighboring Mayan city-states amidst some personal ambition to seize power of the throne. Lord Mountain Eagle seeks a balance of the advice. He appoints delegations for negotiations with the Spaniards outside the city to be headed by the ambitious Lord Nakum, forces to organize to defend the city headed by the bold commander Tecum and a diplomatic mission of the Quiche Maya headed by Coatl to seek help from the neighboring Cakchiquel Mayan city-state of Huehuetenango. It is obvious that there are underlying secret schemes and plots involved particularly by the Lord Mountain Eagle's old ally, Coatl and the lord himself.

Patut reads an ancient prophecy of doom from the ancient Mayan book of *Chilam Balam,* which sparks a debate about its interpretation, its vagueness and the relevancy of the past to the present and future. United by a sense of protecting and preserving their city, the council closes with commitments to completing the assigned tasks of the delegations.

Chapter 4 The Urgent Assembly

A few hours after the ruling council meeting when he learns of the Spaniards' approach, Lord Mountain Eagle summons via booming drums the council and all the people of Chichicastenango to the great temple in the main square. In this crisis situation, he informs the people of the delegations of Lord Nakum to meet the Spaniards on the outskirts of the city for negotiations and that of Tecum, the commander, to ready the city's defenses. He makes no mention of Coatl's delegation to Huehuetenango to arrange an alliance with Sequixpec and their neighboring kin, the Cakchiquel Mayan city-state. Coatl realizes too that Lord Mountain Eagles suspects he has other motives hidden with his mission.

Lady Water Lily, the lord's only surviving heir, appears determined to inherit her father's position with the encouraging support of her mother.

Tecum speaks to the crowd and receives their enthusiastic support to defend the city at all costs. Elaborate religious rituals are conducted atop the towering pyramid in front of the temple to

seek divine intervention of the gods, especially the moon god, Ix Chel, and the war god, Ah Puc. The lords and priests chant prayers, sacrifice a deer, shed their own blood--all of which is accompanied by the haunting rhythm of drums and flutes. The ritual is climaxed by the bloody sacrifice of a willing young girl, precious human blood to secure the gods' intervention. Chela and Zotil question the need for the human sacrificial ritual and challenge the basic moral premise of a society where the lords' rule burdens the masses.

Lord Mountain Eagle has secretly concluded an arrangement of marriage for his daughter to another lord's family, hoping to relinquish his power to this new royal couple.

Bolon Sky, the astronomer, has studied the constellations intently and thinks he sees disastrous omens for the future of the Quiche Maya. However, fearing such a revelation would possibly cost him his life and thinking that perhaps he made a misinterpretation, he decides to keep his opinion secret.

As Zotil and Chela question the privileged rule of some lords, their own noble heritage and future, Patut senses change, chaos and revolution.

Chapter 5 The Arrival of Alvarado

In 1524, Captain Pedro de Alvarado leads an expedition to the Mayan highlands in Guatemala in quest of fame, fortune and glory while his commanding officer, Captain Hernan Cortes begins a similar expedition to the Mayan lowlands. Both Spaniards have become rich and famous through their conquest of the Aztec empire and other major Indian tribes in Mexico.

To stop the cruelty and atrocities of the conquistadors, the Catholic Church with the permission of the king of Spain has sent friars on the expedition. Fr. Paredes is determined to save souls while Capt. Alvarado and greedy Lt. Suazo are equally committed to finding more treasure and squashing all resistors.

The wily Alvarado has managed to enlist the Cakchiquel Maya as allies in the assault on Chichicastenango. The Cakchiquel see an opportunity to defeat soundly their long-time rivals and take part in the pillaging with their Spanish allies.

Lord Nakum's diplomatic delegation is annihilated by the Spaniards. It is unclear how the fighting began.

Lord Mountain Eagle is angered by the news of the Cakchiquel alliance with the Spaniards. He wonders how they could be such fools in trusting the white invaders. Coatl receives a secret message from his high priest friend of the Cakchiquel, Sequixpec, asking him to meet at the Mayan jungle city of Yaxchilan. Lord Mountain Eagle wonders if Sequixpec can be trusted and muses outloud about the scheming plans of Coatl. He grants permission to Coatl to proceed to Yaxchilan with his schemes unrevealed and the authority to take whomever he wishes. But the lord orders him to take his daughter, Lady Water Lily, and his wife, Lady Water Hyacinth, in case the battle turns against them.

The Quiche Maya resist valiantly the attack of the Spaniards and their Indian allies. Though inspirationally led by their commander Tecum and having vast numerical superiority, the Maya cannot successfully overcome the devastating weaponry of the Spaniards--horses, muskets, cannons, swords, armour and crossbows. Thousands of Maya are killed in a battle that rages for hours. In a desperate attempt to turn the coming defeat into victory, Tecum charges Alvarado in hand-to-hand combat, hoping that by killing the dynamic Spanish commander that victory will belong to the Maya.

Instead Tecum is slain by Alvarado. Lord Mountain Eagle and Lady Water Hyacinth are also killed by Lt. Suazo. The resistance crumbles. Chela's life once again is saved by the old woman from the marketplace whose identity and ultimate intentions remain a mystery.

Coatl and Bolon Sky attempt to save some sacred ancient Mayan manuscripts while the Spaniards loot the temple and destroy religious statues. Coatl secretly slips the Tikal map of the ancient ones into his robe. Caught in the act by a Spaniard, he is saved by Bolon Sky. They are stopped by Fr. Paredes who realizes their religious mission; but he decides to let them escape with the Mayan books.

Outside they join with Patut and his family and Lady Water Lily. They escape the marauding Spaniards through a secret temple passageway, escape the city at night and flee into the forest.

Zotil wonders where Coatl will lead them, recalling his initial distrust of the scheming old priest.

Chapter 6 The Raging River Chixoy

Zotil is puzzled by his dream in which a sacred quetzal bird addresses him by his name. Was it simply a strange dream or a vision with the gods attempting to communicate with him?

Ticuita and Patut reluctantly leave their foster children in Coatl's care and return to Chichicastenango to help their people endure the Spanish rule. Coatl and Bolon Sky plan to take Chela and Zotil to the old city of Yaxchilan, ruled by Lord Jaguar Teeth of the Kekchi Maya. Despite traditional animosities, they hope the lord will protect them in face of the Spanish invasion and help them reach Tikal. Coatl still hopes to escort the noble youth there to help preserve the royal lineage. The orphaned Lady Water Lily agrees to accompany them, demonstrating a resolute will and maturity surprising for her young age.

Zotil once again doubts the religious powers of Coatl and questions the meaning and impact of his rituals on any god. A baffled and dejected Coatl is somewhat mollified by Bolon Sky's philosophical explanation of human vicissitudes and the importance of risk-taking efforts. But Zotil remains skeptical of priestly power and plans of preserving the status quo royalty.

They begin their journey in the Cuchumatane Mountains gradually descending to the lowlands. Borrowing canoes from the valley farmers, they travel down the beautiful River Chixoy. The young paddlers receive a baptism of swirling water as they survive the powerful rapids of the river and learn a new respect for the Chixoy.

After the rapids, they come upon an awaiting delegation of Kekchi Mayan warriors on the Chixoy riverbank next to Yaxchilan.

Chapter 7 The Shaking Earth of Yaxchilan

Soon after their arrival in Yaxchilan, Coatl and the other refugees meet with the ruler, Lord Jaguar Teeth and Lady Morning Star. They are surprised by the sudden appearance of Sequixpec, the

high priest from Chichicastenango, who had asked Coalt to meet him there. Apparently he had arrived earlier along with his assistants Chancolin, Ixtumal and Sumal; but was being held incomunicado by the lord. Another surprise is the appearance of the court advisors, Shele and Cauac, who somehow managed to escape the destruction of Chichicastenango by the Spaniards. They eagerly offer their assistance to Coatl. The refugees boldly request the help of the lord--an alliance of different bands of the Maya, an escort across his kingdom and guidance in searching for the lost city of Tikal. The shrewd, blunt, dictatorial lord listens to their plea for help and a possible alliance but is also quite aware of the disadvantages of fighting the formidable Spanish foes. He even notes the advantages of an alliance with the Spaniards as already enacted by the Cakchiquel Maya. He also recalls the historic rivalry between his Kekchi Maya and the Quiche Maya. The aggressive, manipulative Lady Morning Star seems to be influencing her husband against helping their guests, seeing little gain in such action.

In a moment of eloquent speech, Lady Water Lily exhibits leadership in explaining the importance of an alliance between a royal family and the Mayan tribes, especially considering that the treasure-hunting Spaniards are already seeking other supposedly rich cities to conquer, including remote jungle cities like Yaxchilan. Lord Jaguar Teeth respects Lady Jaguar Teeth's reasoned appeal, comprehending the dangers of defending his weak city whose past fabled brilliance would indeed attract the greedy Spaniards. The indecisive lord decides to take time to consider the matter and possible options in detail with his advisors while declaring a special religious ceremony to appeal to the gods for help in making his decision. He also declares that his "guests" will be closely guarded, that is, prevented from leaving the city.

Coatl and Sequixpec fear the lord's decision may go against them if the Lady Morning Star has too much influence and discuss if they should attempt an escape. Commissioned by the lord to study the night sky for omens, Bolon Sky, the astronomer, takes Chela, Zotil, Lady Water Lily and Chancolin to the observatory. He points out the flaming volcano, Mt. Pacana, on the western horizon, a possible bad omen illustrating the gods' displeasure. Other omens he detects in the constellations and night sky of the moon goddess he keeps to himself.

Meanwhile the irreverent Chancolin makes the others laugh with his sarcastic flip comments and attracts the admiring attention of Chela and the wit of Lady Water Lily--something pointed out by Zotil. Lady Water Lily increasingly shows herself to be a careful observer and analyst of human character.

In an attempt to relax Chela, Chancolin serenades her with flute music as they sit atop the pyramid overlooking the city and jungle. As the haunting music lures her into a trance-like state, Chela imagines herself floating through the air to an unknown abandoned site of ruins in the jungle. Seemingly invisible to a shadowy group of figures in a square amidst crumbling temples, she sneaks up behind a figure and pulls out the jaguar-shaped sacrificial knife the old woman in the marketplace gave her. As her arm is poised in the air ready to strike, she awakens and finds herself in the midst of Lord Jaguar Teeth's religious ritual in the Temple of Shield Jaguar, using the exact type of knife Confused and hesitant, she wonders if the trance or dream was a message from the gods intended to spur her to action against the lord or simply to win his favor by showing it to him and acknowledging her royal ancestry.

Dressed in symbols of death and other insignia honoring the moon goddess, the lord and Lady Morning Star both let blood while imitating their great royal ancestors who are preserved in the temple lintel carvings. The lady, in particular, conducts an agonizing ritual in which she pulls a cord through a hole in her tongue.

There are ominous hints that the captives are in danger when rumbling sounds begin which are interpreted by Lord Jaguar Teeth as a message from the gods. To his surprise, it is a devastating earthquake which causes destruction, chaos and fear while interrupting the ceremony. While guards tend to the fallen lord and lady, Coatl and Sequixpec lead the others in a quick escape--something they had prepared as an emergency contingency plan--a plan that is opposed initially by Cauac and Shele. Disappearing into the dark jungle, they hope to cross the lord's kingdom to Tayasal where they hope to find help from another Mayan lord, Canek, in searching for the lost city of Tikal.

After their escape from Yaxchilan and Lord Jaguar Teeth, the group is led by Sequbxpec's assistants, Ixtumal and Sumal, over an ancient trade causeway through the jungle towards Tayasal. They fear a pursuit by Lord Jaguar Teeth and crossing the jungle maze territory of the fierce Putun, isolated secretive jungle dwellers.

Zotil grows increasingly fond of Lady Water Lily, admiring her beauty, intelligence and boldness. Chela is attracted to Chancolin's outrageous sense of humor and playfulness. When she seeks his help in interpreting her dream or vision, she is disappointed with his vague, elusive answer and feels that he is hiding something from her.

The bawdy irreverent humor of Chancolin and Sequbxpec initially keeps the group entertained but the rigors of walking in the hot, humid jungle eventually wear them down.

Their guides explain the ingenious causeway system and elevated agricultural plots of the ancient Maya and introduce them to useful jungle plants and animals.

Lady Water Lily is overcome by jungle fever and is saved by a medicinal tea concocted by Coatl.

As they enter some isolated ruins of a jungle ceremonial center, Chela recognizes it as the place she visited in her vision. Before she can warn anyone, they are captured by the hostile Putun tribe who consider them as just another enemy who has traditionally preyed upon them, reducing the tribe to wandering jungle dwellers.

Without any discussion, the Putun chief, Scorpion, orders a truth test by hurling a bound captive, Ixtumal, into the sacred vast underground well, the cenote. If he survives the plunge and emerges, then their captives will be released. But Ixtumal dies and soonafter, Sumal dies in the same manner.

In the meantime, Chela has managed to loosen the cord that bound her hands and cut herself free with her jaguar knife. While Chancolin is being led away, she frees Coatl, Sequbxpec and Zotil. Driven by the power of her sacred jaguar knife and the act she saw herself committing in her vision, she stabs the guard just as he was about to push Chancolin into the cavern. Wielding the jaguar knife in the sunlight at the Putun, she is transformed into some sort of threatening messenger

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from the jaguar god, chastising them for their assault. Coatl then shows the Putun her feathered-serpent pendant, further enhancing her stature and power as a favorite of Kukulcan, the serpent god whom the Putun worship.

Coatl reveals his glass vision stone, and, while the sunlight refracts magically through it, he becomes an oracle for the gods, threatening their revenge on the Putun unless they release their captives and lead them safely to Tayasal. To help sway Chief Scorpion of the Putun to release them, Chela gives him her mysterious serpent pendant charm.

Chief Scorpion persuaded by the intimidating power, words and charisma of Chela and Coatl; but he also becomes convinced they had intended no harm. He agrees to have them escorted safely to Tayasal.

Noting the transformation of Chela and her possible captivation by the powerful ancient mysterious forces of the jaguar knife and serpent pendant, Coatl worries whether she can control such possibly corrupting powers.

Chapter 9 The Cunning Conquistador Cortes

After the encounters with Chief Scorpion and the Putun, Lord Jaguar Teeth and the Kekchi, the travelers discover a new determination within themselves to finish the journey. Shaped by these crisis, Zotil and Chela have emerged more mature but also more wary. Burdened by his aged body struggling through the jungle, Coatl wonders again what destiny the gods have planned for him. Beset by the calamities he has witnessed, he once again doubts his own religious beliefs, his faith and his mission. While admiring Coatl's wisdom and dedication, Lady Water Lily empathizes with his self-doubt and fatigue. She wonders how much more the old man can endure.

Chancolin and Sequixpec continue to relieve the stress among the group with their bizarre humor. The friendship between Chancolin and Chela grows while Zotil continues to admire the dynamism of Lady Water Lily.

The Putun guides lead them to Tayasal, the island city in the middle of Lake Peten Itza, then disappear. When they find out from local fishermen that Hernan Cortes and the Spaniards have

peacefully occupied the city, they decide to let Shele and Cauac set up a clandestine meeting with the Itza Maya ruler, Lord Canek.

Later they all enter the city at night and meet with Lord Canek. Having visited the lord years earlier, Sequixpec finds the lord to be very nervous. They soon find out that they have walked into a trap of the Spaniards, plotted by Lord Canek, Shele and Cauac.

The Spaniards seize them by surprise and tie them up. Their former foes, Srgt Suazo and Fr. Roca from the siege of Chichicastenango, try to persuade their captives to reveal sites of hidden treasure. When Fr. Roca sees that Coatl has saved some ancient religious books, he accuses him of harboring secret maps in them. Cortes examines the Mayan glyphs in the book and cannot read them. But as he talks to each of the captives searching for clues, he attempts to cleverly manipulate them in an effort to find out information about the rumors of hidden treasure. Shele had previously informed him of Zotil and Chela's true identity as kin to a noble bloodline of lords. When Cortes cannot extract any information from any of them, he announces that Chela will be executed in the morning--unless they cooperate. The Spaniards leave and turn over the task of extracting information to Shele and Cauac.

Facing the hostile resentment of their captives, Shele and Cauac explain their hatred of the noble ruling class and its traditional role of suppressing the common people while living in luxury. They proudly proclaim their secret plotting with a group dedicated to the overthrow of the noble rulers to be replaced by rulers selected by the people. Thus, part of their scheme was to remove any kin to the nobles, such as Chela, Zotil and Lady Water Lily. With the arrival of the Spaniards and the upheaval in Mayan society, they seized the opportunity to plot against the nobles.

Shele notes that the young people have sympathy for their cause against the noble ruling class but she cannot attain their approval of a violent overthrow or assassinations. Lady Water Lily guesses that her secret plan is to have them all executed--even if they cooperate with the Spaniards--so that more nobility will be removed and they can help rule the Mayan kingdoms with their secret anti-lord society and themselves. Shele explains that their only hope is to cooperate then somehow use the time to somehow save themselves.

Coatl reveals that he has a hidden treasure map to Tikal stashed in the forest outside the city. He states that he will turn it over to the Spaniards if they free the rest of the hostages. But as he is negotiating with Shele and Cauac, friendly Maya storm the room and overwhelm the two Spanish guards. They are led by the old woman from the Chichicastenango marketplace who had previously saved Chela's life.

As the old woman attempts to free Chela, she is stabbed by Shele who then turns to kill Chela. Chela attempts to defend herself with her jaguar knife but is slashed by Shele and drops her knife. Just as Shele is about to stab Chela, Chancoiln intervenes and in a struggle, he stabs Shele and she falls to the ground. As he attempts to free Coatl, Bolon Sky is slain by Cauac. As Cauac begins to cut Coatl's throat, he is killed by lance thrust of Sequixpec. In the confusion, Shele manages to escape undetected.

With her dying words, the old woman reveals that she is really Lady Corn Silk, the grandmother of Zotil and Chela; and, as part of Coatl's plan to protect them, she had disguised her identity.

Fearing the return of Shele with the Spanish soldiers, they leave some Mayan friends to bury honorably Lady Corn Silk and Bolon Sky in the jungle while they flee in the night across the lake. Coatl vows that he must endure to complete his destiny in leading the group to Tikal.

Chapter 10 The Search for Tikal

Suspecting that the Spaniards might pursue them immediately, the travelers, led by a Itza Maya guide, set out on an old causeway to Tikal and camouflage their trail with various tricks.

Zotil questions Sequixpec about his prior visit to Tikal and whether it is a worthy destination--if indeed they can find it and it amounts to more than a pile of stone rubble. Sequixpec does not provide an answer, saying only that Zotil must decide for himself once he reaches it.

Coatl and Zotil discuss Shele's revolutionary actions, thoughts and goals for the Mayan people. While Coatl suggests some of her motives are for self-interest and power, Zotil still admires her audacity and willingness to stand up for the common people.

Still somewhat distrustful of Coatl's unspoken plans, Lady Water Lily recruits Chela as an ally to a secret plan. Showing her trust, Chela, however reluctantly, gives Lady Water Lily her mysterious jaguar knife, the potent talisman given to her by Lady Corn Silk.

While trudging through the jungle, they are visited by a jaguar, experience a powerful thunderstorm, and even engage in some adventurous vine-swinging to cross some ravines.

Finally they arrive at Tikal, passing through the dilapidated residential area, a ball court, some small temple mounds. While examining a handsome stela of a former Mayan ruler, Chela is greeted by Amachel, a young high priest and guardian of Tikal.

He escorts the group through the magnificent Great Square flanked by two immense pyramids. Amachel explains that they are a small loyal group who are dedicated to preserving some of Tikal and the best of Mayan culture.

Chapter 11 Entering the Serpent House

Coatl gives Amachel the two ancient Mayan books which he saved from the Spaniards' book-burning in the Chichicastenango temple. He also gives him the map of Tikal which had been entrusted to him for safe-keeping. Drawn centuries before, the map had been passed on by many generations of priests and it supposedly indicated a secret repository of Mayan heritage at Tikal. Amachel immediately recognizes the section of the city known as the Square of the Seven Temples.

But while Lady Water Lily distracts their attention by using the ancient books, Chela steals the map, leaves the temple and hides it. To get the map back, Lady Water Lily persuades Coatl, Sequixpec and Amachel to promise to help bring about a change in Mayan society involving more democratic leadership, more concern for the common people, elimination of intertribal warfare and unity among all Maya. She also draws blood from her wrist and that of Amachel, mixes their flowing blood together and demands his allegiance on a blood oath. In effect, the older generation agrees to support the ideas of change of the younger generation.

Chela returns the map and they proceed to the Square of the Seven Temples. Soon they interpret the map correctly, find a secret passageway in the Serpent House of the Moon and discover a room filled with Mayan treasure. To Coatl and Sequixpec, the unexpected treasure is a library of ancient Mayan books containing information about every aspect of Mayan society. They recognize the books as the true treasure.

They are surprised by the appearance of Lt. Suazo, Fr. Roca, Shele and several Spanish soldiers. With swords in hand, they claim the treasure. But when Fr. Roca attempts to burn the ancient books, he is stopped by Coatl. Lt. Suazo mortally wounds Coatl; but, before he dies, he sets fire with a torch to Fr. Roca. Coatl whispers to Chela that it is her destiny to help lead her people then dies.

While Fr. Roca is consumed in flames, Amachel, Chancolin and Sequixpec fight and kill the soldiers while Lady Water Lily chases the fleeing Shele. Zotil vengefully attacks Lt. Suazo futilely; and, when tricked by the wily Spaniard, he is mortally wounded by a sword thrust. In a vicious revenge, Chancolin cruelly slays Lt. Suazo.

Lady Water Lily fights Shele with the mysterious powerful jaguar knife; but, in a moment of introspection, she realize that Shele and herself are similar in some ways. She doubts whether she can commit yet another act of violence of a Mayan against a Mayan. But Shele kicks the jaguar knife away from her and when she holds it in her hand, she feels an energizing special power and clumsily lunges at Lady Water Lily, intending to kill her. Instead, she trips in the struggle and falls to her death in the *cenote*.

As Zotil is attended to by his friends, he once again sees a quetzal bird which had appeared to him in an earlier vision. As he notices that he has somehow been transported to the jungle, the quetzal bird bids him to fly away with him to the heavenly other world. It is then that Zotil understands that his vision of the quetzal bird was a premonition of his death. Transformed into a quetzal bird, he accompanies the bird to the other world and flies over his own funeral procession.

Coatl and Zotil are to be buried in the Temple of the Giant Jaguar. During the funeral procession, Amachel, Lady Water Lily and Chancolin have all planned to stay at Tikal to affect the

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changes in Mayan society by their younger generation. They invite Chela to stay at Tikal and help them. Chela happily agrees, noting that it was Coatl who believed it was her destiny to help lead her people; and, in bringing her to Tikal, he willingly gave up his life helping her to fulfill her destiny.

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